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ARCHEOLOGY OF THE OZARK REGION OF MISSOURI

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INTRODUCTION

The southern part of Missouri presents an interesting and extensive field for archeological research, and one of which little is known.

The surface of the southern half of the state, south of Missouri river, is very rough and irregular ; the bluffs which extend along the Mississippi, and the ridges of Jefferson, St. François, and other border counties may be considered the foot-hills of the Ozarks, which, as they continue westward, gradually rise until, in Green and Dallas counties, they attain an elevation of about two thousand feet. Throughout the region are many rapid streams of clear spring water ; the Osage, the Gasconade, and many lesser streams flow northward and empty into the Missouri, while the James, the Black, and others flow in a southerly course and join White river, itself a tributary of the Arkansas. A great part of the country is covered with a heavy growth of timber — oaks and cedars on the ridges and many varieties of soft wood in the lowlands.

That the country was well adapted to the wants and requirements of the native tribes is evident, and that it was at one time thickly peopled is shown by the great number of village or camp sites and other prehistoric remains which have been discovered. The existing evidence and remains of the Indian occupancy may be divided into three classes :

1. Remains in the caves.
2. Village and camp sites.
3. Extensive groups of small mounds.

I.—THE CAVES

Numerous caves exist in the limestone bluffs bordering the Gasconade, the Piney (a branch of the Gasconade), the Niangua, and

other streams throughout the Ozarks. Many are quite large; those near the Gasconade and Piney rivers usually consist of one large chamber having an opening from ten to fifteen feet in height and often fifty or sixty feet in width, while from the main chamber passages lead to other cavities. Few caves are without a stream of clear, cold water several inches deep and four or five feet in width. In many it is possible to ascend the streams several hundred yards.

The caves show evidence of having been occupied for a long period. At the openings are masses of wood ashes and charcoal, filling the space between the sides to a depth of five feet or more — in one cave the depth of the deposit is more than seven feet. The accumulations do not appear to be stratified, but apparently resulted from long-continued occupancy. Intermixed with the charcoal and ashes are implements of stone and bone, fragments of pottery vessels, and shells from the river beds, as well as bones of various animals, birds, and fishes, which served as food. Such vast quantities of ashes are conclusive evidence that man occupied the caves during many generations, possibly centuries.

In a cave near the Piney, a few miles above its mouth, is a small stream about three inches in depth and several feet in width, which enters the main chamber through an opening not more than four feet in height. A few yards up the stream the passage widens several feet and continues so for a short distance; this was caused by pieces of chert having been detached from the mass, *in situ*. The stone had been quarried and used by the Indians, and the bed of the stream was strewn with broken and roughly-formed implements.

This general description will apply to all caves in the valleys of the Gasconade and Piney, as well as to many others in various parts of the Ozarks. No indications of the existence of man preceding the modern Indian have as yet been discovered in the caves.

II. — VILLAGE AND CAMP SITES

The village and camp sites occur in the bottoms, on the banks of the rivers. Where two streams unite there is always evidence of a settlement; in several instances stone implements may be found scattered over an area of ten acres or more, indicating the site of a large village. An extensive village site exists on the right bank of

the Gasconade, a few miles below the mouth of the Piney. Near the center is a shell-heap, fifty or sixty feet in length, in which have been found fragments of pottery vessels and broken implements of stone and bone. Another site, although smaller, occupies the level area on the left bank of the Gasconade opposite the mouth of the Little Piney. On the right bank of the Piney, at the mouth of Spring creek, are the remains of an extensive settlement, near the center of which is a large shell-heap.

Graves are found on the summit of the bluffs overlooking the streams and lowlands. The bodies had been placed either upon the surface or in a slight depression made by removing the thin layer of earth and mold which covered the rocks. Upon and over the remains were placed stones, forming heaps from two to four feet in height. Only small fragments of bone remain, and few ornaments or objects of stone or pottery are ever found in contact with the burials.

A large settlement was also situated at the mouth of the Piney, in Pulaski county; and, indeed, evidence of camps may be found on every prominent and desirable point along the water-courses.

In the valleys of James and White rivers, sites are even more numerous and more clearly defined than in the vicinity of the Gasconade. That part of the state being thinly settled, much of the bottom land has not been cultivated, consequently many of the ancient sites remain as they were left by the Indians.

A very important and apparently extensive site is situated on the E $\frac{1}{2}$, of lot 1, S. W. $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 9, Tp. 22, R. 23, Stone county, on the left bank of White river. Near the center of the site were found four large sandstone mortars, the concavity of the largest being about fifteen inches in diameter and six inches in depth, while the block of stone was more than two feet in thickness. Mortars of similar form, though much smaller, were found on many sites along both rivers. One interesting specimen was found on the village site situated on the E $\frac{1}{2}$ of Sec. 22, Tp. 23, R. 24, Stone county, on the left bank of James river. A rectangular block of sandstone has been used, the concave surface being six inches in diameter. A village covering several acres was once situated on on the left bank of White river, near the mouth of Bull creek, in

Taney county ; while only a few miles below, on the opposite side of the river, were indications of a much larger settlement. Numerous camp sites were discovered on the banks of the river, and were always found where creeks entered the larger streams.

Quantities of stone implements were found scattered over the surface of the twenty or more sites which were examined in the valleys of James and White rivers, but not a fragment of pottery was discovered. Evidently earthenware was neither made nor used by the occupants of these villages. On the other hand, while many potsherds are found on the ancient sites along the Piney and the Gasconade, no stone mortars have ever been discovered there. The entire region is worthy of careful and thorough examination ; the results would be of scientific value and doubtless many interesting specimens would be revealed.

These numerous sites, some of which are very extensive, certainly indicate the existence, during some former time, of a large population in the valleys of the Ozarks.

III. — GROUPS OF SMALL MOUNDS

On the high plateau of Dallas county, north of the Niangua, which is a tributary of the Osage, are extensive groups of small, low, artificial mounds. In one a fire-bed was discovered beneath only a few inches of earth and vegetable mold ; in another a small arrowpoint was found near the original surface ; but neither objects nor indications of fire were discovered in any other mound, although many were examined. These mounds occur in groups of from one hundred to one hundred and fifty ; within an area smaller than ten square miles, eight hundred and sixty were counted. They are placed in parallel rows, usually along water-courses or on the western slopes. Many of the mounds were measured and the average diameter found to be forty-five feet, elevation twenty-seven inches.

No indications of villages were discovered in the vicinity of the mounds, and no implements of stone or bone were found on the surface. It is difficult to conceive for what purpose the mounds were erected, unless to serve as elevated sites upon which the habitations were placed. If this be the correct explanation, there should cer-

tainly be indications of the occupancy, either in the form of implements or of ashes and charcoal. Nothing of this character, however, is found, and the absence of graves in the vicinity is also difficult to explain.

Near Iron Mountain, in St. François county, more than five hundred of these small mounds, arranged in parallel rows following the direction of the water-courses, were counted within a radius of three miles. The most interesting group is situated in the valley west of Iron Mountain. One mound of this group is shown in plate XII. No objects or graves were discovered in the vicinity.

A group of some fifty similar mounds is situated on the right bank of the Meramec, about six miles above its mouth, in Jefferson county. A few mounds of the same type are also found on the bank of the Mississippi, above the mouth of the River des Peres, within the city of St. Louis.

Many other mound groups are known to exist in different localities, but the description of one is applicable to all.



A SMALL MOUND NEAR IRON MOUNTAIN, SAINT FRANÇOIS COUNTY, MISSOURI